Developing a Classroom Observation Instrument based on Iranian EFL Teachers' Attitude

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Abstract

To observe teachers, different instruments have been developed. The problem with the instruments developed yet is that these instruments are based on particular assumptions of researchers about the classroom and teachers' preferences have been neglected. In order to help bring teachers' attitudes as important criteria to the field of classroom observation, the researchers, in the present study, developed a new observation instrument totally based on teachers' attitudes.

To inquire about teachers' attitudes, a two-phase study was conducted: a qualitative and a quantitative phase. In the qualitative phase an interview survey was conducted with 20 EFL teachers. A content analysis of the transcribed data yielded 35 most frequent items related to the features teachers liked to be included in classroom observation instrument. These items formed the statements in a likert-type questionnaire which was administered in the quantitative phase of the study.

In order to check teachers' ideas at large and to check the construct validity of the resulting instrument a questionnaire survey was conducted on 161 EFL teachers in the quantitative phase of the study. A factor analysis of the data yielded 10 factors with 33 items meaningfully loading on the specified factors. The results of the analyses indicated that the resulting

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observation instrument based on teachers' attitudes could be considered reasonably valid and reliable.

Keywords: Attitude, Observation, Observation Instrument

1. Introduction

To observe teachers and second language classrooms, different approaches have been employed by the observers. There have been two broad approaches to observing teachers: qualitative and quantitative approaches. According to Day (1990) the way an observer describes the classroom events is different in these two approaches. Qualitative approach was aimed at making a complete record of all the events that occur in the classroom. It is especially useful when the observer wants to capture a broad picture of a lesson rather than focus on a particular aspect of it. On the other hand, techniques or instruments found under a quantitative approach to classroom observation generally take the form of a checklist or an instrument to be filled in or completed. Here the behaviour or behaviours in question are indicated in some fashion, and the observer's role is to record their occurrence and, as appropriate, the time (For a deeper understanding of qualitative and quantitative approaches to observation, see Brandt, 1974; Gay 1987; Worthen & Sanders, 1987; Dublin & Wong, 1990; and Rosnow & Rosenthal, 1996).

Though many observation instruments have been developed in past decades, their validity has been put somehow under question by recent studies on teacher education in the post modern era. The problem with the existing instruments is that, as Thomas (1987) mentions, these instruments are based on particular assumptions of researchers about the classroom. They are based on different theories of teaching and good practice developed in researchers' mind and teachers' preferences have been neglected. On the other hand, teacher reflection and consequently teacher autonomy have recently acquired prominence in discourse on second language education. This teacher autonomy can be obtained only when

teachers decide for themselves and not be followers of researchers' decisions (Smith, 2004).

In this situation studies that seek harmonization between and congruence of teachers' attitudes and the observation techniques are not only desirable but also imperative. In order to move along the recent advancements in teacher education we did an investigation in this regard. We developed a new observation instrument totally based on teachers' perceptions in order to help bring teachers' attitudes as important criteria to the field of classroom observation, to give teachers the role they deserve, and to help them gain centrality in their affairs.

To achieve the goal of the study the following research question was posed: What is Iranian EFL teachers' attitude towards teacher observation?

2. Review of Literature
Since the late 1970s about 25 classroom observation instruments have been developed to describe second language classrooms. There are many points in which the instruments are different. Some were originally developed for research purposes, but then were used for teacher development purposes. Some were developed for classes other than language teaching, but were then adapted for language teaching classes. The instruments also differ in the type of the recording procedures they use, the kinds of categories they contain, the complexity of their categories, and the focus and range of behaviours they describe. Some instruments just focus on a description of pedagogic events, and some on linguistic behaviours, still others include both of them (Spada, 1994).

The first observation instrument was developed by Flanders in 1963. The system developed by Flanders was called FIAC, an acronym for Flanders Interaction Analysis Categories. It focuses on the verbal interaction in the classroom and categorizes verbal behaviour into various types of teacher talk and student talk. It contains ten categories: seven designate teacher behaviour, two are for student behaviour, and one is for silence or confusion (Jarvis, 1968; Moskowitz, 1968; Thomas, 1987; and Allwright, 1988).

Some researchers have referred to the deficiencies they observed in Flanders' instrument. For instance, Moskowitz (1968) referred to the point that foreign language classrooms had been forgotten in this instrument. She also criticized FIAC due to its failure to give the observer enough information concerning student participation. Rosenshine (1970) and Bailey (1975), further, felt dissatisfaction about the weaknesses inherent in Flanders's system, unnoticed by its practitioners. Among the problems Bailey mentions are: problems in category definition and interpretations, the way in which observations are made, the reliability of the observations, the significance of the data, and the practicality of the methods; needing a long time to master using the instrument (Allwright, 1988).

In the following years, different alternatives to FIAC were proposed as an answer to the shortcomings inherent in interaction analysis (Allwright, 1988, p.125-193). The first and the most significant alternative, FOCUS (an acronym for Foci for Observing Communication Used in the Settings), was developed by Fanselow in 1977. The system was aimed at both teacher training and research purposes. Fanselow highlights the importance of noting the setting in which communications take place, because he believes that the setting has a strong effect on determining patterns of characteristics of communications. He also focuses on five characteristics of communications both in the classroom and the settings outside the classroom: *the pedagogical purpose, the source*, *the medium*, *the content* and *the use*. These five characteristics form the categories designed in FOCUS based on which the classroom interactions will be analysed.

Fanselow summarizes the benefits of using FOCUS as 1- It permits us to develop technical information about what the practicing language teachers and their students actually do both in classrooms and other settings; 2- It operationally defines terms that don't require a high degree of inference. So it helps provide precise descriptions of the events; 3- It helps us examine the effects different communications have on learning; and 4- It enables us to translate the suggestions and theories from the linguistics, advocates

of particular theories and others into precise objectives (Allwright, 1988; Gebhard, 1999).

Allwright (1988) reflects upon FOCUS and attributes some merits and drawbacks to the instrument. One of the merits he mentions is that Fanselow had devised a system for all settings and for all sorts of participants. Also, in comparison with Flanders's categories, Fanselow's categories better represent the complexities of the language classrooms. Allwright, then, refers to the comprehensiveness of this system in comparison with the inadequacies of the instruments developed earlier. Notwithstanding these merits, Allwright proposes some objections. For example, he mentions that Fanselow could focus on the use of video-recording equipment rather than focusing on an instrument to be used in real time observations. The other point is that FOCUS is clearly a highly complete system.

The observation instruments covered, includinig Flanders' FIAC and all its alternatives, were included in the interaction analysis tradition by Thomas (1987). He introduces a second group of observation instruments that could be used to build up a comprehensive profile of the sort of teaching methodology practised in any classroom or set of classrooms. Here it is important to know what is to be taught and learned in any lesson and not only what kind of interaction takes place.

COLT is the main instrument Thomas mentions in analyzing methodology. It provides a broad and general description of the language classroom (a macroscopic description). This instrument was developed in the early 1980s by Allen, Cummins, Mougeon and Swain to describe differences in the communicative orientation of language teaching and to determine whether and how this contributes to differences in L2 learning outcomes. The categories included in COLT are, for the most part, theoretically driven. Their conceptualization was derived from a comprehensive review of theories of communicative language teaching, theories of communication, and theories of first and second language acquisition (SLA) research.

This instrument consists of two parts. Part A which describes classroom practices and procedures at the level of the activity, is done in 'real' time. Part B, which describes the verbal interactions between teacher and students within activities, is used in post hoc analysis that in most instances is done from transcriptions of audio-recorded data. Most of the 73 categories that are distributed across part A and B of COLT represent binary distictions in instructional practices (e.g., student-centered vs. teacher-centered participation; reaction to form or message; genuine vs. psudo requests). The existence of many categories within parts A and B of the COLT instrument gives it the capacity to capture information about a multitude of different classroom behaviours at the level of activity type and the verbal interaction that takes place within them. Depending on the reasons for its use, it may not be necessary to use both parts of the instrument or all the categories within each part (See Spada, 1990a; Frohlin, Spada & Allen, 1985; and Spada & Lyster, 1997 for a detailed description of COLT, its development and validation).

The review of literature on classroom observation shows the development of many observation instruments in past decades. But one important point to remember is that almost all of these instruements have neglected teachers' affective attitude toward being observed. In addition, none of them has tried to base its design on the preferences of practicing teachers. In other words, most of these schemes are imposed on teachers, not based on classroom reality. This is while today the increasing studies on post modern condition and reflective teaching signifies the importance of giving priority to teachers' attitudes and preferences, what leads to teacher autonomy, i.e. 'professional freedom and self-directed professional development' (Barfield et al., 2001 citing Benson, 2001, p. 174). This point clearly justifies the necessity of developing an observation instrument based on teachers' attitudes.

The next point to remember is that along with the development of different observation instruments, there has been a significant move away from the field's apparent confidance in any one system to suffice for all sorts of data, for all purposes (Allwright, 1988, p.

155). This uncertainty is even consolidated when we are working in a different context, with different goals for education, different definitions for good language teaching, etc. With this premise in mind, the necessity of developing an observation instrument that best suits the situation we live in is deeply felt.

3. Method

To identify features teachers would like to be considered in classroom observation instrument, the researchers conducted a two-phase study. The first phase of this study used a qualitative method, i.e. conducting interview, to richly describe teachers' attitudes towards classroom observation. The second phase utilized a quantitative method, i.e. questionnaire administration, in order to identify and examine teachers' belief among the population and to check the construct validity and reliability of the resulting instrument.

3.1 Phase 1: Qualitative phase

The sampling method in this phase of the study was that of criterion-based selection. In this form of sampling the researcher creates a list of the attributes essential to the study and then seeks out participants to match these criteria. Our criteria were as follows: a) EFL teacher, b) teaches at different English institutes of Tehran, c) is English major, d) teaches book one of New Interchange series, e) has the experience of being observed more than 3 times f) has less than 3 years of experience. The research participants in this phase of the study were 10 men and 10 women.

To get teachers' attitude, the researchers conducted face-to-face individual interviews with the participants of the study. The kind of the interview the researchers used was half-structured.

The following steps were followed by the researchers for the interview phase of the work.

> *1. An interview schedule was created by the researchers* (See Appendix 1).
>
> *2. Some appointments were made with the participants of the study.*

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3. The interview was conducted by the researchers.
4. The responses were recorded by a tape-recorder with the permission of the participants.
5. The interviews were then transcribed by the researcher. Finally more than 140 pages of transcripts were obtained.

To analyze the interview transcripts, the method of content analysis was used (For a complete review of content analysis, its practical applications and overview of concepts, refer to Granheim & Lundman, 2004; Krippendorf, 1980; and Busha & Harter, 1980). It yielded 35 most frequent items teachers preferred to be included in classroom observation instrument. The total 35 items were included in a questionnaire to be answered by a greater number of teachers in the second phase of the study.

3.2 Phase 2: Quantitative part

The sampling method in this phase of the study was that of convenience sampling. The participants in this phase of the study were 161 EFL teachers who were teaching at different language institutes in Tehran and some other cities, like Shiraz, Mashad, Ghuchan, Zanjan, Sirjan, etc., where teacher observation is regularly practiced. This sample included 69 male and 72 female respodents. Nineteen respondents failed to indicate their gender. The teaching experience of the respondents ranged from 9 months to 216 months (18 years).

The participants filled a questionnaire containing 35 statement items derived from the content analysis of the transcribed data in the first phase of the study. It was of a likert type questionnaire having six levels extending from 0 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)(see appendix 2 for a sample of the attitude questionnaire).
A total of 300 questionnaires were administered either through a face-to-face contact of the researchers with the specified teachers or through an e-mail contact. A total of 161 questinnaires were returned to the researchers.

The responses to the questionnaire were fed into SPSS for the analysis. First the reliability of the instrument was calculated using

Cronbach alpha reliability. Then factor analysis was run to check the construct validity of the instrument.

4. Results & Discussion

To develop an observation instrument, the obtained data were analysed in some steps. In the first step the transcribed data of the interviews were subjected to content analysis. In the next step the most frequent statements mentioned by the interviewees, extracted from the content analysis of the transcribed data, formed the statements included in the resulting questionnaire. A total of 35 statements were included in the questionnaire. When the questionnaires were filled out, the data were subjected to SPSS to check the reliability and validity of the resulting instrument.

In order to test the construct validity of the instrument the 35 items were submitted to principal component analysis with varimax rotation. Eleven factors emerged with eigenvalues greater than one, accounting for 64% of the variance in the respondents' scores. We set as a criterion loadings higher than 0.30 to select items loading on each factor. It was revealed that all the items had loadings above 0.30 on the resultant factors. So no items were omitted from the instrument at this stage as being not correlated with the other items. The loadings ranged from 0.30 to 0.80. From among the 35 items, 2 items did not load meaningfully on the factors and so were eliminated. The items excluded are 'free discussion is an important factor in effective teaching', and 'in an effective teaching all language skills are covered'.

After removing the specified items, factor analysis was again run with the remaining 33 items and 10 factors were resulted with eigenvalues greater than one, accounting for 62% of the variance in the respondents scores. The first factor had an eigenvalue of 7.268 and accounted for 22% of the variance in the respondents' scores. Loadings higher than 0.30 were selected. The loadings ranged from 0.35 to 0.80. See table I. for factor loadings of the 33 items.

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Table 1: Factor loadings of 33 item observation instrument

Teacher observation instrument, 33 items	Factor loadings

Factor 1: *Classroom management*
12. A good teacher must be able to control the classroom situation.
                                                               .50
13. A good teacher must have a lesson plan for teaching.   **.69**
14. A good teacher must answer the learners' questions patiently.**.55**
15. A good teacher must be tolerant of different ideas in the
classroom.   **.63**
17. Teacher preparedness leads to effective language learning.
                                                               .46

Factor 2:   *Learner involvement*
1. A good teacher must provide a friendly environment in the
classroom.   **. 3**
16. A circle or semi-circle chair arrangement in the classroom helps
learners interact more.   **.36**
 21. Learners' pair-work and group work are essential to effective
language learning.   **.45**
22. A high student's talking time is needed for better language
learning.   **.68**
26. Role play is an essential part of the language classroom.   **.56**
27. Student encouragement creates a high motivation in learners to
learn better.   **.53**
30. Students must be actively engaged in classroom activities.
                                                               .42

Factor 3: *Teacher's use of the facilities*
4. A good teacher must use teaching aids to facilitate learning.
                                                               .67
20. Classroom environment, e.g. relevant posters on the wall, helps
facilitate students' learning.   **.74**

Factor 4: *Learner autonomy*
6. A good teacher must teach learners how to learn.   **.68**

7. A good teacher must provide a learner-centered environment. **.50**

8. A good teacher must provide a negotiated curriculum.   **.60**

9. A good teacher must help learners become reflective language learners.   **.40**

24. In an effective language teaching students' self and peer correction are encouraged.   **.70**

Factor 5: *Teacher's use of the real situation*

2. A good teacher must create real situations in the classroom. **.68**

3. A good teacher must familiarize learners with the foreign culture.
                                                                    .56

25. In an effective language teaching the language of communication is English.   **.76**

Factor 6: *Teaching coverage*

33. Teachers' guidebook must be followed by teachers in the language classroom.   **.76**

34. A good teacher must cover all the syllabi dictated by the institute's manager.   **.80**

Factor 7: *Teacher personality or teacher capability*

11. A good teacher must have the ability to transfer information clearly.   **.53**

18. Teacher creativity leads to effective language learning.   **.71**

31. A good teacher must be physically active in the classroom, moving around the students.   **.35**

35. Teacher's poise and confidence is essential in effective language teaching.   **.76**

Factor 8: *Learner assessment*

28. Students must be assessed based on their production in real situation.   **.72**

29. Learners must be assessed continuously in each session.   **.57**

Factor 9: *Concern for learners*

5. A good teacher must consider learner differences, needs, interests and their level.   **.65**

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Factor 10: *Teacher's characteristics*
10. A good teacher must have a high level of language proficiency.
.76
32. Teacher appearance is an important factor in effective teaching.
.42

Examinig the table reveals that all the items have meaningful relations to the specified factors. Based on the commonalities between different items loading on the same factor, the resulting factors were labelled: 1. classroom management, 2. learner involvement, 3. learner autonomy, 4. teacher's use of the facilities, 5. teachers' use of the real situation, 6. teaching coverage, 7. teacher personality, 8. learner assessment 9. concern for learners, 10. teacher characteristics. These meaningful loadings of the items on the specified factors prove the construct validity of the 33 item observation instrument. The Cronbach alpha reliability of the instrument is also 0.86 that helps us claim that the instrument enjoys a high reliability as well as validity.

The results of the analyses indicate that the resulting teacher observation instrument based on teachers' attitude could be considered reasonably valid and reliable. With 33 items it is of reasonable length and should prove to be a reasonable tool to be used in teacher observation. The 33 items also represent the requirements of good teaching.

Based on the results of the study, the following classroom observation instrument, totally based on the principles teachers would like to be embedded in classroom observation, is introduced.

Table2: Classroom observation Instrument based on EFL Teachers' Attitude

Name of teacher:	Name of observer:					
Class level:	Ability:					
Content of lesson:	Date:					

No / Levels / Items	(0)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
1 The teacher provided a friendly environment in the classroom.						
2 The teacher created real situations in the classroom.						
3 The teacher familiarized learners with the foreign culture.						
4 The teacher used teaching aids to facilitate learning.						
5 The teacher considered learner differences, needs, interests and their level.						
6 The teacher taught learners how to learn.						
7 The teacher provided a learner-centered environment.						
8 The teacher provided a negotiated curriculum.						
9 The teacher helped learners become reflective language learners.						
10 The teacher had a high level of language proficiency.						
11 The teacher had the ability to transfer information clearly.						
12 The teacher was able to control the classroom situation.						
13 The teacher had a lesson plan for teaching.						
14 The teacher answered the learners' questions patiently.						
15 The teacher was tolerant of different ideas in the classroom.						
16 The chair arrangement in the classroom was in circle or semi-circle						
17 The teacher was prepared for teaching.						
18 The teacher had creativity in teaching.						
19 The teacher used the classroom environment, eg. relevant posters on the wall to help facilitate students' learning.						

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20	Learners' pair-work and group work were encouraged.						
21	A high student's talking time was promoted.						
22	In an effective language teaching students' self and peer correction are encouraged.						
23	The language of communication was English.						
24	Role-play was an essential part of the language classroom.						
25	Student encouragement was a component of language teaching.						
26	Students were assessed based on their production in real situations.						
27	Learners were assessed continuously.						
28	Students were actively engaged in classroom activities.						
29	The teacher was physically active in the classroom, moving around the students.						
30	The teacher appearance was in a standard level.						
31	Teachers' guide book was followed by the teacher.						
32	The teacher covered all the syllabi dictated by the institute's manager.						
33	Teacher's poise and confidence was high.						

Teacher's total score: Observers' signature: Teacher's signature:

5. Conclusion

Inquiring about teachers' priorities regarding teacher observation will help us move along the revolutions in teacher education practices: the recent focus on teacher reflection and teacher autonomy. The present study was conducted to serve this purpose. Specifically the study aimed at addressing the following question:

- What is Iranian EFL teachers' attitude towards teacher observation?

The answer to this question formed an observation instrument totally based on teachers' ideas. The instrument includes 33 items to be considered by classroom observers in their observation of teachers. By adopting the instrument totally proposed by teachers, we allow teachers take much of the responsibility for the

observation and be involved in the rational behind teacher observation.

This instrument may offer particular promise for English schools and institutes. It may provide rich opportunities for teacher improvement.

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Appendix 1: Interview questions
Teachers' attitude toward effective observation instrument

What is your idea of effective teaching?
What is your idea of effective teacher?
What is your idea of effective learning environment?
Identify things you would like the observer pay special attention to (e.g. classroom management, assessment, etc).
How do you feel about the observation instruments that are introduced now? (if any)
What is an effective observation instrument?

Appendix 2: The interview questionnaire

Dear respondant :
This questionnaire is designed to help us understand the EFL teachers' attitudes regarding the the features they like the observer attend to in teacher observation. The overall goals of the study is to develop an observation instrument based on the attitudes of EFL teachers.
Directions:
Please indicate the degree of your agreement with each of the statements below by choosing one of the six levels, from strongly disagree (0) to strongly agree (5), identified in the answer sheet. Choose the first answer which comes to your mind.

No	Items	Strongly dissgree	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Strongly agree
1	A good teacher must provide a friendly environment in the classroom.						
2	A good teacher must create real situations in the classroom.						
3	A good teacher must familiarize learners with the foreign culture.						
4	A good teacher must use teaching aids to facilitate learninng.						
5	A good teacher must consider learner differences, needs, interests and their level.						

6	A good teacher must teach learners how to learn.						
7	A good teacher must provide a learner-centered environment.						
8	A good teacher must provide a negotiated curriculum.						
9	A good teacher must help learners become reflective language learners.						
10	A good teacher must have a high level of language proficiency.						
11	A good teacher must have the ability to transfer information clearly.						
12	A good teacher must be able to control the classroom situation.						
13	A good teacher must have a lesson plan for teaching.						
14	A good teacher must answer the learners' questions patiently.						
15	A good teacher must be tolerant of different ideas in the classroom.						
16	A circle or semi-circle chair arrangement in the classroom helps learners interact more.						
17	Teacher preparedness leads to effective language learning.						
18	Teacher creativity leads to effective language learning.						
19	Free discussion is an important factor in the language classroom.						
20	Classroom environment, eg. relevant posters on the wall, helps facilitate students' learning.						
21	Learners' pair-work and group work are essential to effective language learning.						
22	A high student's talking time is needed for better language learning.						
23	In an effective language teaching all language skills are covered.						
24	In an effective language teaching students' self and peer correction are encouraged.						
25	In an effective language teaching the language of communication is English.						
26	Role-play is an essential part of the language classroom.						
27	Student encouragement creats a high motivation in learners to learn better.						
28	Students must be assessed based on their production in real situations.						
29	learners must be assessed continuously in each session.						
30	Students must be actively engaged in classroom activities.						
31	A good teacher must be physically active in the classrooom, moving around the students.						

32	Teacher appearance is an important factor in effective teaching.						
33	Teachers' guide book must be followed by teachers in the language classroom.						
34	A good teacher must cover all the syllabi dictated by the institute's manager.						
35	Teacher's poise and confidance is essential in effective language teaching.						